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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study that investigated the effects of participation in collaborative supervision on the ability of individuals to perceive the helpfulness of others' responses, their ability to make helpful responses, and their perceptions of themselves and others as helpers. Subjects of the study were 44 student teachers and their cooperating teachers, who were randomly selected from ten student teaching centers in Tennessee. Subjects were randomly divided into a control group that followed the usual pattern for student teachers at the University of Tennessee and an experimental group. Experimental subjects received training in collaborative supervision skills and then were assigned for ten weeks to five collaborative teams consisting of two or three student teachers and their cooperating teachers. Three instruments were used as pretests and posttests to assess the impact of participation in the collaborative supervision program; these included an "Index of Responding," an "Index of Perceiving," and a semantic differential instrument. (Author/JG)

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COLLABORATIVE SUPERVISION: ROLE-ACTOR RELATIONSHIPS IN SUPERVISION

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by

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COLLABORATIVE SUPERVISION: ROLE-ACTOR
RELATIONSHIPS IN SUPERVISION

I'm sure you remember reading in Winnie the Pooh: "Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it."

We would like to think that in collaborative supervision we have stopped bumping on the back of our heads for just a moment and that there really is another way!

When I first began wondering if collaborative supervision really would work, I did some tentative probing in a junior high school in Knoxville. I was coordinating a project of the College of Education of the University of Tennessee and the Knoxville City Schools to open lines of communication between the college professors and the public school teachers by bringing the college professors out of the ivory tower long enough to see what is really going on in the classroom and to make public school teachers aware of the resources available to them and of their own potential contribution to the college program--a rather unique large scale collaborative effort between the two groups.

We arranged for a group of three interested teachers to try out some collaborative supervision. They were given released time to explore with me ways in which they might give technical and psychological help to each other. These two women and one man represented three subject areas: English, science, and social studies. They worked together in

various combinations with their principal, with Dr. Lovell, and with me. Their first project was to learn a system of interaction analysis in order to help the English teacher to determine what was preventing the desired level of involvement in one of her classes. They observed each other and taught for each other when their special expertise suggested it. For example, the male science teacher who was an expert on rock poetry, taught some English classes; and the English teacher, in turn, helped him with plans for improving writing skills in his science classes. They covered for each other to allow for released time to visit interesting things going on in the city in their subject areas. Involved in their efforts at various times were administrators, junior high students, and university students and professors.

These tentative probings seemed to indicate that collaborative supervision might work in the in-service setting. I began to wonder what would be its potential for the supervision of student teachers. The student teaching situation seems to lend itself particularly well to testing some of the assumptions underlying collaborative supervision. You remember Dr. John Lovell has described it as a conceptualization of supervisory behavior based on the assumption that the interdependence, competence, and specialization of workers within the educational organization--and this includes student teachers--make possible the giving and receiving of help from unequal positions of influence. Thus, in the student teaching situation, it might help to overcome such problems as (1) insufficient university coordinator time to devote to individual teachers, (2) lack of subject matter competency on the part of coordinators in all student teaching areas, and (3) lack of personal reward to cooperating

teachers, who under a collaborative system could benefit not only from increased understanding of supervisory behavior, but also from utilization of the current training, and university contact brought to the situation by the student teachers.

When we take a close look at current thinking about student teaching: two key concerns emerge:

(1) A concern for more cooperation of professionals in supervision as evidenced by increased attention to clinical approaches, to the teacher education center concept, to the sharing of supervisory duties among university faculty members, to the increased training of cooperating teachers, and to inter-institutional development of student teaching programs.

(2) A concern for increased responsibility on the part of the student teacher for his own growth and for that of his fellow teachers. L. Craig Wilson noted that "Teachers are asking, not for supervisors to relieve them of decision making functions, but for an increase in their professional responsibilities as teachers. They are asking, in short, to become participants in supervision rather than the objects of it."

Collaborative supervision, it seemed, could be an answer to these concerns: It would provide a framework for their own growth, and for that of their fellow professionals and it would, by definition, involve more professionals.

The College of Education of the University of Tennessee agreed to help us find out how collaborative supervision would work. And I would like to comment here that to get the research project off the ground, an unusual amount of collaboration occurred. Both the Department of

Curriculum and Instruction and the Department of Educational Administration and Supervision gave their support. The Bureau of Educational Research and Service and the Office of Student Teaching helped to coordinate the effort.

Three studies were included in the joint project: Jerry Hock looked at the effects of collaborative supervision on leadership; Art Earp, at its effects on psychological and technological support; and I, at its effects on helping relationships.

Again, here, I might comment that the three of us learned a great deal about collaboration as we tried to coordinate our efforts. We agreed that a really fascinating bit of research would have resulted from an examination of our own group processes as we worked together for several months.

The sample of 44 student teachers and their 44 cooperating teachers was randomly selected from ten student teaching centers, which are set up geographically and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups.

The control group continued to function in the existing university pattern.

The university coordinators continued to operate in exactly the same manner as usual with both control and experimental subjects; they did not participate in the training sessions, the review sessions, or any of the collaborative functions of the treatment.

The treatment provided for the experimental student teachers and cooperating teachers consisted of three phases.

1. Eight three-hour training sessions in collaborative supervision skills and concepts during the winter quarter preceding the spring quarter student teaching experience.

2. Ten weeks of participation in collaborative supervision during the spring quarter.

3. Two review and evaluation sessions during the spring quarter.

Experimental subjects were assigned to five collaborative teams consisting of two or three student teachers and their cooperating teachers. We wanted to provide two kinds of conditions for these teams:

First, the student teachers needed the opportunity to develop a concept of themselves as supervisors and a feeling of responsibility for providing psychological and technological support for other members of the team.

Second, the teams needed the opportunity to develop and utilize in a collaborative manner appropriate supervisory skills. Thus, the members could help each other in all dimensions of teaching behavior. Such help was predicated upon effectiveness in communication, in cooperative planning, in describing and analyzing teaching behavior, and in working with fellow teachers in the process of actualization.

To insure these conditions, a series of workshops was provided according to the following purposes: first, to help cooperating teachers and student teachers develop a role concept that includes the process of helping and being helped by other teachers and, second, to help them develop the skills necessary for helping and being helped.

Eight consultants, all of whom were professors of education at the university were selected to provide the necessary concepts and skills.

The purpose of the workshop was described as providing the necessary understandings and skills for functioning in collaborative supervision:

Three necessary understandings were identified: (1) an understanding of the concept of collaborative supervision, (2) an understanding of group process, and (3) an understanding of concepts of communication. The skills needed were identified as (1) the supervisory skills of describing, analyzing, and planning, (2) problem-solving skills, and (3) verbal and nonverbal communication skills.

The researchers, working with the consultants, who had special strength in the areas of supervision, group process, and communication, developed a list of 20 competencies which those functioning in collaborative supervision should possess. Eight three-hour workshop sessions were then planned and conducted during one winter quarter to provide the treatment group with these competencies.

The collaborative teams thus worked together to acquire the concepts and skills of collaborative supervision during the winter quarter and then functioned during the spring quarter with the student teachers actively participating in the supervisory behavior system. During this time the researchers conducted two additional workshop sessions for the purpose of review of collaborative principles and planning.

Pretesting of subjects for the whole project was conducted at the beginning of winter quarter; and posttesting, at the end of spring quarter.

The survey of previous research on five areas related to collaborative supervision seemed to indicate that: (1) supervisors of student teachers are finding it both beneficial and necessary to work together to achieve their goals; (2) student teachers have professional competencies which they desire to use for their own improvement and that of their fellow teachers; (3) many cooperating teachers have recognized the expertise

of their student teachers and utilized it for improvement of their own teaching; (4) the relationship between student teacher and cooperating teacher is a critical one; and (5) ability to perceive helpful responses and respond effectively in helping situations is a function of effective interpersonal relationships. It seemed to me that we needed to look at how collaborative supervision would affect these helping relationships.

My part of the research, then, investigated the effects of participation in collaborative supervision on the ability of the subjects to perceive the helpfulness of others' responses, their ability to make helpful responses, and their perceptions of themselves and others as helpers.

Three instruments were used as both pretests and posttests (1) the Index of Responding; (2) the Index of Perceiving; and (3) a semantic differential instrument.

Both the Index of Responding and the Index of Perceiving were developed by Dr. George Gazda and his associates at the University of Georgia as educational adaptations of the widely-used indices constructed by Robert R. Carkhuff and his associates.

These two instruments look at the helping relationship in the educational setting in two different ways: the Index of Responding measures the level of helpfulness of a teacher's response in eight different problem situations, and the Index of Perceiving measures the ability of a teacher to assess the level of helpfulness of several teacher responses provided for eight different situations.

The semantic differential consisted of four concepts: "Student Teachers as Helpers," "Cooperating Teachers as Helpers," "Being Helped by Other Teachers: and "Myself as Helper."

I would like to review briefly the conclusions made on the basis of two sources of information: (1) the data gathered on the changes between pretest and posttest administration of the three instruments and (2) informal sources of feedback such as personal observation, evaluation made by the participants, and university coordinator assessment.

First the conclusions from the data:

Analyses of variance and correlational analysis revealed the following:

1. Collaborative supervision treatment groups were significantly better able to perceive helpfulness in responses than were control groups. An interesting side-light is that all control subgroups did more poorly on posttests than on pretests of this measure.

2. Collaborative supervision treatment groups were not significantly better than control groups in providing helpful responses.

3. No correlation existed between growth in the ability to perceive helpfulness and the ability to give helpful responses.

4. No significant differences appeared in perception of "Student Teachers as Helpers," "Cooperating Teachers as Helpers," or "Myself as Helper."

5. The experimental group had significantly more positive perceptions of "Being Helped by Other Teachers" than the control group. The difference seemed to be attributable to negative changes in the control students on this concept. Cooperating teachers, on the whole, gained more in positivism on this concept than student teachers.

6. Very significant correlations existed between the concepts of self as helper and of others as helpers. The subjects' perceptions

of themselves as helpers apparently changed in the same direction as their perceptions of others as helpers changed.

7. A significant correlation existed between the concepts "Being Helped by other Teachers" and "Student Teachers as Helper."

8. There was evidence that the treatment had, in general, more positive effect on cooperating teachers than on student teachers and on secondary student teachers than on elementary student teachers.

My informal observations indicated that the cooperating teachers and student teachers enjoyed working together as members of collaborative teams, that planning sessions by teams led to improved classroom teaching, that student teacher anxieties were lessened, that adjustment for the student teacher to the school situation was easier, and that student teachers had more opportunities to perceive themselves as professionals.

Student teacher experimental participants in the study commented often on the lessening of anxiety, the satisfaction resulting from increased classroom responsibility, and the added technical help available from team members. Cooperating teacher participants pointed out the value of planning with student teachers, the personal and professional advantages of receiving help from student teachers, and the increased understanding of the supervisory skills necessary to effective functioning as cooperating teachers.

To summarize, this is what the study told us:

1. Collaborative supervision positively affects the ability of student teachers and cooperating teachers to perceive helpfulness.

2. Collaborative supervision positively affects attitudes toward being helped.

3. Changes in perceptions of being helped by other teachers are positively correlated with changes in perceptions of student teachers, subordinates, as helpers.

4. Changes in perceptions of the self as helper are positively correlated with changes in perceptions of others as helpers.

5. Changes in ability to make helpful responses are not correlated with ability to perceive helpfulness nor with perceptions of self or others as helpers.

6. Training and participation in collaborative supervision enhances the student teaching experience for both student teachers and cooperating teachers.

7. Training and participation in collaborative supervision may in some instances have different effects on student teachers than on cooperating teachers and on elementary teachers than secondary.

These conclusions seem to have several implications for instructional supervision as well as for both preservice and inservice education of teachers.

Three implications might be drawn for instructional supervision as a whole:

1. Teachers can become more receptive to being helped as they work in a situation which requires collaboration, or the giving and receiving of help from unequal positions of influence or authority. This increase in receptivity goes hand in hand with more positive perceptions of subordinates in the role of helper. Collaborative supervision, then, seems to held potential as one means of helping to overcome the isolation in the instructional setting which arises from fear that revealing need for help is an admission of professional inadequacy.

2. Teachers receive positive reinforcement from working together to help one another. They are able to give one another both psychological and technical support.

3. Collaborative supervision, as implemented in this study, provides increase in ability to perceive helpfulness, a necessary but not a sufficient condition to being able to give helpful responses; therefore, further attention would be required to aid teachers in making helpful responses.

The following implications seem to hold for preservice education:

1. Collaborative supervision can help to overcome some of the trauma and negativism created in the student teacher by the student teaching experience.

2. Collaborative supervision appears more effective in meeting the needs of secondary student teachers than elementary student teachers.

For inservice education, the following implications seem apparent:

1. Collaborative supervision has a very positive effect on co-operating teachers; therefore, it may have potential for inservice training.

2. Cooperating teachers need training in the human relations skills prerequisite to the helping relationship.

Encouraged by these findings, I became interested in the potential for using collaborative supervision in the student teaching program in Secondary English at the University of Georgia. The Department of Language Education at Georgia has developed a two-quarter five-phase field experience in which teacher candidates work with three university professors in English methods, reading, and educational psychology and with groups of in-service teachers in both a middle school and a secondary

school. The first four phases of the program move the student teacher from simple clerical duties, tutoring, small-group instruction, and large-group instruction to full responsibility for a quarter. The fifth phase of the program involves collaborative supervision, allowing student teachers who are ready to give help to other student teachers and cooperating teachers to do so. Working with this program in Atlanta has confirmed what my study indicated. Subordinates can function effectively in the supervisory behavior system. Let me give you three examples. One cooperating teacher will begin tomorrow morning to teach a quarter of journalism using plans developed by a student teacher who has special abilities in the field. Last year a student teacher in English developed an interdisciplinary study of the literature of ecology; planning and implementation were shared by cooperating teachers in science and English, the student teacher, the English department chairman, a representative of the Atlanta Public Schools Environmental Studies program, and the university coordinator. The plans were even borrowed by a school in North Carolina that wished to institute a similar program. Two girls who teamed with each other in a totally individualized class in the short story were asked by a group of cooperating teachers to teach them how to individualize.

I have also tried to explore the potential of collaborative supervision for in-service teachers. For example, a large metropolitan Atlanta high school organized for team teaching has discovered to its dismay that teams have to learn to function collaboratively. I worked with one of these teams last summer on the utilization of the vastly differing kinds

of expertise in the group. During the year the team started pulling in help from others, for example, they invited members of one of my undergraduate university classes, to contribute special skills and materials to augment their composition program.

I believe collaborative supervision can be considered as a viable alternative to the traditional patterns of supervision in both pre-service and inservice education. I would like to find out what would happen if the workshop had included special training in making helpful responses. I would like to know what would happen if the university supervisor were included as an active member of the team. I would like to know why the treatment had different effects on elementary and secondary student teachers. I would like to know how our plan could work in the inservice setting. Maybe if I could stop bumping on the back of my head long enough, I could find out.